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Groveland City Council Member, District 4



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Spring is the time we tend to open our doors and windows and air out the house. I would like to address how the city is following suit and seeking to open itself up to being more transparent.

Shortly after taking my seat on the council, I introduced the concept of applying the core values of Service, Excellence and Integrity to the city's actions. Each of these values require us to be transparent in our actions. In my newsletters, my intention is to make the city and its activities more transparent to residents and our surrounding area.

In celebrating the city's 100<sup>th</sup> birthday, the final major event is taking place this month. Please take a look at the Upcoming Events section of this newsletter to see what is planned for later this month.

### **Charm Grant Program**

When first elected to the city council, I recognized the council did not have a formal process or criteria for charitable organizations to apply for a grant from the city. These were previously accomplished by an informal ask of a councilmember or city manager. Further, there was no requirement that the grant or donation have a direct benefit to the residents of Groveland.

I worked with the city Finance Department and we created an Outside Agency Funding Program which was formally established in 2020. This program required that the event/purpose of the grant must be open to and provide a benefit to the citizens of Groveland and contribute to the economic vitality of the community. It also required that the organization making the application to be a 501(c) (3) corporation and the organization must provide a service that improves the quality of life for the citizens of Groveland.

Recently the policy was amended and it is now formally titled the **Charm Grant Program**. The requirements that were introduced in 2020 remain and grants under this program must benefit the residents of Groveland. Currently the city council has budgeted \$25,000 annually to support this grant program. The deadline for this year's grant applications is April 15, 2022. For those interested in the program or applying for a grant, you can get more information on the city web site at:

<https://www.groveland-fl.gov/DocumentCenter/View/6016/City-of-Groveland-Charming-Grant-Program>

If you do not make the deadline this year, make sure you mark your calendar for next year's grant application period, which opens on May 1, 2023.

### City Employees Recognized

The city staff is comprised of a hard-working team that continually embodies the city's core values of Service, Excellence and Integrity. Hopefully your experience in any dealings you may have had with staff have been ones that you found pleasant and helpful. My military background enabled me to see the rewards of valuing employees and ensuring they were recognized for outstanding performance. With this in mind, I had the pleasure of working with the city's senior staff in crafting a program for the city that recognizes outstanding performance by city employees and contributions to the city by members of the public. Below are some recent awards given by the city and the South Lake Chamber of Commerce

- Police Officer Oscar Palma was recognized as the **Police Employee of the Quarter**.
- Battalion Chief Michael Franklin was selected by his peers as the **Fire Officer of the Year**.
- Firefighter/Paramedic Glenda Gaines was selected by her a **Firefighter of the Year**.
- City Manager Michael Hein was selected for the **Public Service of the Year Award** by the South Lake Chamber of Commerce.

### Transparency

What has the city done to improve transparency? Our goal is to align ourselves with the International City/County Management Association (ICMA). This association states "Transparency is the principle of allowing those affected by administrative decisions to know about the resulting facts and figures (e.g., the city budget) and about the process that resulted in those decisions. Transparent governance means that government officials act openly, with citizens' knowledge of the decisions the officials are making. Availability of information on government policies and actions, a clear sense of organizational responsibility, and an assurance that governments are efficiently administered and free of systemic corruption are important components of transparent governance." (<https://icma.org/transparent-governance-anti-corruption>)

**Below is a list of actions the city has taken.**

- Posting of council and committee agendas on city website with detailed attachments. They can be accessed at: <https://www.groveland-fl.gov/AgendaCenter>.
- Revising the city web site.
- Live broadcasting of city council and advisory board meetings via Zoom.
- Automatic notification of all public meetings, alerts, events, city calendar and news flashes. You can sign up on line for these notifications at: <https://www.groveland-fl.gov/list.aspx#agendaCenter>.

Has the city reached the level of transparency it wants? No. There are plenty of opportunities for the city to expand its efforts. Additionally, as residents identify areas where they believe transparency can be improved, the city will work to address those concerns/issues. Some of the future changes the city is currently working that will improve its ability to make information available upon demand include:

- An app for your phone that allows you to see events, report issues, and locate information on the city and its services.
- Installation of interactive signs at various locations within the city that allow citizens to learn of what is happening in the city, including public meetings and agenda information.
- Publish more city documents on the city's Document Center web page at: <http://groveland-fl.gov/documentcenter>.

As the city continues to grow, it will become even more necessary for its residents to be aware of, and understand the reasoning for, the decisions the city and its elected officials are making and how those decisions will impact them. If you have some ideas or areas that you believe the city can improve in, take a moment to email us your thoughts/idea at [Ideas@Groveland-fl.gov](mailto:Ideas@Groveland-fl.gov).

### **Oak Tree Union Colored Cemetery of Taylorville (Old Groveland Cemetery)**

Shortly after becoming a councilman, my fellow councilman John Griffin told me of the existence of an African-American cemetery that had been neglected for a number of years. He called the cemetery the Old Groveland Cemetery and brought to light that a number of World War I veterans were interred in that cemetery.

Working the past few years with city staff has led to the city taking ownership of, and actions to restore, what is probably the first African-American cemetery in the city. It is likely one of the earliest cemeteries within Lake County. To the best of our current knowledge, the earliest graves are from the 1890's with the latest interment being around 1951. This would be consistent with the history of the African-American community in Groveland. Early African-American families, who came in the 1890's, included those of the Gadsons, Blues and Harts. In fact, a headstone for Israel Gadson, one of the first African-Americans in Groveland, and for whom Gadson Street is named, is located in the cemetery. This cemetery is also home to a number of African-Americans who served in the World War I. Restoration of this cemetery and the headstones of those interred will provide the community with insights on how those individuals impacted the city in its early days. I will be posting regular updates on this effort in the coming months, so please follow our efforts to restore the cemetery and honor those interred there.

### **HOPE International Church/Groveland Teaming Up**

The City of Groveland and Hope International Church have entered into a lease/program management agreement to share certain areas within the church's facilities. This agreement provides the city an opportunity to operate and facilitate programming for recreational and educational purposes to the community. The agreement allows for the city's use of the new gymnasium and various classrooms at Hope. Working together, Hope and the city are excited about the ability this agreement creates for providing recreational opportunities for city residents. An example of some of the programs are:

- Youth and adult sports
- Fitness
- Creative & fine arts
- Youth and teen clubs
- Educational opportunities
- Community events
- Adult/senior activities

The dates and times being proposed for the use of the facility during the terms of the agreement are year-round, January through December, (Monday-Friday from 3:00 p.m. till 9:00 p.m.). Spring Break and summer hours are 6:00 a.m. till 6:00 p.m. Saturdays are available if mutually agreed upon and the city will have exclusive use of one-half of the gymnasium during the days and times mentioned.

### City Donates Property to FAITH Neighborhood Center

The South Lake community has grown at a rapid pace, especially within Groveland. In order to continue to efficiently accommodate the economically disadvantaged families and individuals in South Lake County, the Faith Neighborhood Center is in great need of expansion.

In 2021, they received a grant from the Live Well Foundation. After looking at various potential sites in Groveland, FAITH asked if the city would consider donating the unused land on which the Public Safety Center is built, as this would be ideal for their proposed center. The city council voted unanimously to declare the unused land surplus and deed it over to FAITH Neighborhood Center

When completed, the new center will provide healthy foods with minimal processing; case management services and referrals; education for job skills; life enrichment, and physical and emotional wellbeing. In addition, the Center will house a non-profit think-tank incubator providing volunteer opportunities, and will host training and workshops available to individuals in the South Lake community.

### Business of the Month

**Chefing It Up**, located at 115 S Lake Ave in downtown Groveland. This is a true family restaurant, with Chef Vinny Ascolese, his wife Eliana and other family members cooking and serving meals to their customers. Recently, **Chefing it Up** was able to obtain the space next door and have expanded their operations to include indoor and outdoor seating. Wine and beer is now on the menu. If you want a good Italian meal, give them a try.



*Chefing It Up Interior and Patio Seating*

In future newsletters, I will try to highlight a local small business in Groveland. If you are not aware, the city has a small business development program, **Buy Groveland**, championed by Councilwoman Barbara Gaines. This program seeks to grow the small business community within the city. To learn more about **Buy Groveland** you can look at what they offer from their website at: <https://www.buygroveland.com>.

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## Upcoming Events

### ***Centennial Celebration***

The city's centennial celebration culminates this month on April 23<sup>rd</sup> at Lake David Park when we will explore the future of the city. Events will begin at noon and continue till 6 pm. There will be live music, an International Food Truck Festival, kid's zones, exhibitors and a beer garden. Stunt Dudes will also be performing as part of the festivities. You can see some highlights at: [https://youtu.be/u4O\\_EeeDoCo](https://youtu.be/u4O_EeeDoCo).

### ***Farmers Market***

The city hosts a Farmer's Market on the second Friday of each month at Lake David Park in downtown Groveland. The market runs from 5:00pm – 9:00pm. In addition to fresh produce from local farms, there are home-made crafts, live music and food trucks. Come down and enjoy a great evening at a beautiful park.

## Got a Question?

While this newsletter comes out multiple times during the year and I try to pass on information that I believe most residents would find of interest, I also realize I may not be answering all your questions. If you have a question about something going on in the city, please feel free to email it to me at [mike.smith@groveland-fl.gov](mailto:mike.smith@groveland-fl.gov). I will not only answer your email, but I may add your issue to a future edition of the newsletter.

## Subscribe

If you would like to receive future copies of this newsletter, please subscribe for notifications by going to the Notify Me page on the city website at <http://groveland-fl.gov/list.aspx>. When you get to the website, enter your email address in the box and click "Sign In". Next click the envelope icon next to Councilman Smith's Newsletter. You will get a verification email and then a confirmation email after you have subscribed. Once subscribed you will get notification any new newsletters or news bulletins I post. The current and past newsletters are also available online at <http://groveland-fl.gov/468/Councilman-Smiths-Newsletter>.

**Thank you for your interest in the city**

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